

Washington, DC — Today, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) held a meeting with FAA Administrator Marion Blakey, House Committee on Transportation Chairman James Oberstar (D-MN), and Congressman Rob Andrews (D-NJ) to review and outline the impact of the FAA's proposed airspace redesign on Delaware County's citizens, including their safety, health, education, and property values. As a result of this briefing, Chairman Oberstar agreed to hold a Congressional hearing in Delaware County on the FAA's airspace redesign proposal and its impact on Delaware County residents.

Their discussion, which was with the two most important people who make a decision on FAA issues (FAA Administrator Blakey and Transportation Committee Chairman Oberstar), was set up by Joe after he brought Subcommittee on Aviation Chairman Jerry Costello to Delaware County to meet with local officials and Joe's Expert Advisory Board. Chairman Costello, noting that the presentation by the Exert Advisory Board was the best he had seen in 18 years, called Administrator Blakey the next day to tell her he wanted her to receive our panel's presentation.

After an initial meeting with Chairman Oberstar earlier this week about the FAA's proposed airspace redesign and its impact on his constituents, Chairman Oberstar said he was interested in hosting the meeting with Administrator Blakey. During the briefing with Chairman Oberstar, which was held in the Chairman's personal office, Joe's Expert Advisory Board noted that the FAA Noise Mitigation report document and its results are inadequate and has placed unacceptable constraints on full and open consideration of environmental, social, and economic benefits. The Advisory Board stated that (1) the true costs and impacts have not been adequately evaluated, e.g. noise on educational development, air emissions on health, adverse effects on property values, and increased risks in ground safety; (2) the benchmarks, tools, methodologies and models employed are flawed or inadequate; (3) the benefits in flight delay reductions are marignal compared with the overall costs to the surrounding communities (noting that for a 22 minute delay, the proposal only saves three to four minutes) ; and (4) the Airspace Redesign program is driven by aviation operational efficiency considerations, even though Federal NEPA directives state "FAA's decision making process for airport projects must consider the environmental, social, economic, and technical factors of a proposed action and those reasonable alternatives that meet the purpose and need."

Specifically, the Board pointed out that noise abatement, which was originally included in the Purposes and Needs defined in the NY/NJ/PHL Airspace Redesign, needed to be restored and that the FAA needs to conform to the NEPA-implementing instructions for airport projects. They also noted that the Noise Mitigation Report has omitted important details that raise serious questions to the public about the stated impact of the mitigation strategies. For instance, minimum flight altitudes at various points along the proposed flight paths are not provided.

There is no clarification about the “initial headings” that guarantees that air traffic controllers will follow the same headings for all flights. The FAA also failed to indicate the number of flights assigned to each heading at PHL, as was provided for Newark International Airport. Since the report did not describe the differences in complexities for the two airports, the reasoning could not be understood.

As a result of this briefing, Chairman Oberstar has now agreed to hold a Congressional hearing on the FAA’s airspace redesign proposal and its impact on Delaware County’s citizens, including their safety, health, education, and property values, in Delaware County.

During the meeting with Administrator Blakey, Congressman Sestak handed her a letter by the Delaware County Council with a letter from Joe stating he fully supported and endorsed the Council’s positions regarding their concerns with the operational efficiency generated by the FAA’s preferred alternative, the Integrated Control Complex (ICC) plan. The FAA’s ICC plan as proposed would result at best in only minimal reductions in flight delays of around three percent or less even during ideal flying conditions at Philadelphia International Airport (PHL), while significant adverse impacts to Delaware County communities in terms of noise pollution, safety hazards, and property damage would result. The Congressman noted that this is far from an acceptable result.

Along with Congressman Andrews, whose own district is impacted by the current airspace redesign proposal, Joe stressed to FAA Administrator Blakey and Chairman Oberstar that he is also greatly concerned about the failure to fully account for the true cost of social impacts, such as noise on educational development, air emissions on health, as well as the adverse effects on ground safety and our property values, which will cause irreparable harm to affected communities. He noted that in light of overwhelming evidence that noise adversely affects mental and physical health and well being, and in particular on children’s cognitive, language and learning abilities, inadequate attention has been paid to noise-sensitive land uses beneath the prescribed flight paths, such as schools, hospitals, and nursing homes, including how impacts on these facilities will be mitigated.

“The FAA Noise Mitigation report is inadequate and has placed unacceptable constraints on the full and open consideration of environmental, social, and economic benefits. Additionally, the FAA airspace redesign process has failed to consider any alternatives other than those dictated strictly by the purpose and need for operational efficiency, providing inadequate consideration to environmental, social, and economic considerations. And, to that end, I believe there are other viable aviation planning strategies, such as the increased utilization of outlying airfields.”

“Additionally, I am concerned that the Noise Mitigation Report has omitted important details that raise serious questions to the public about the stated impact of the mitigation strategies. For instance, minimum flight altitudes at various points along the proposed flight paths are not provided. There is no clarification about the stated “initial headings” that guarantees that air traffic controllers will follow the same headings for all flights, while the FAA has also failed to indicate the volume of flights assigned to each heading at PHL, as was provided for Newark International Airport (EWR),” added Joe.

In office only 100 days – during which time he established and met with his advisory board of local and national aviation experts 10 times (including meeting with the FAA several times), met with Deputy Secretary of Transportation Maria Cino, and held two summits/hearings on the issue in the district, among working the issue through legislative and other means in Washington – Joe stressed that FAA must address all concerns to fully mitigate any impact on the safety, health, education and property values of his constituents.

In the meantime, Joe is working with Congressman Rob Andrews, on legislation to ensure the process does address both of their concerns on the FAA’s proposed airspace redesign on their citizens’ safety, health, education, and property values and takes into account a real cost/benefit analysis of the proposal.

Joe noted that he will: (1) continue to work with the FAA to lay out what needs to be done to fully mitigate any impact on the safety, health, education and property values of my constituents so that the airspace redesign process is delayed until all concerns are addressed and there is no noise impact; (2) work on a real cost/benefit analysis that illustrates the marginal benefit of the proposal compared with the substantial costs to his constituents; (3) work on legislation to similarly address our concerns by stopping the airspace proposal until a new process is followed to eliminate noise; and (4) support litigation as necessary to help us achieve the goal of stopping the current proposal.

*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "DeepBlue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security*

*Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. □ According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.*

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